The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 21 MARCH 20th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

The correspondence of the last two or three weeks brings further evidence of the difference in outlook between the younger and older generations. One of our members who heard Lord Halifax at Oxford writes that, looking down from the galleries, where the undergraduates sat, on the university dons below, he could not help feeling that here were two different worlds. I have had other letters in a similar sense.

On the other hand, I have been severely taken to task for the letter which I quoted (C.N.-L. No. 17) from one of my younger friends in which he said that the situation seemed quite appallingly black. A bishop writes that a situation may look like this to young thinkers at the universities who sit back and think, but that it begins to be less dark when we get into the thick of things and begin to tackle it. In other words,

Kiddies and grown-ups too-oo-oo
If we haven't enough to do-oo-oo
We get the hump—
Cameelious hump—
The hump that is black and blue.

The bishop also gives two quotations which seem at first sight to confirm the gloomy view, but they happen to have been written by Dr. Thomas Arnold more than a hundred years ago. To recall the past is often a cure for undue pessimism about the present.

Both these points are true. But the fundamental problem remains. We are faced with something which has never existed before in human history. Technical invention has brought into existence a totalitarian society equipped with wholly new techniques for controlling not only the bodies but the minds of men. Those who hold the key positions of control can impose ideas on the entire community; and, more serious still—since the mind has the power to react against what is forced upon it—can close every avenue to certain types of knowledge and experience. They can thus create a generation whose minds are impenetrably closed both to the minds of other people and to important aspects of reality. In the hands of evil men the central controls can be used to poison the whole mind of a generation. (You may recall the remark of a German girl quoted in C.N.-L. No. 16.)

The dictatorships have established a system of spying and terrorism which begets universal suspicion and distrust. Men can remain normal and sane only when they are able to trust one another. The unleashing of forces which create anxiety and fear dissolves the bonds of society. That way madness lies.

In this country, also, life is increasingly subject to influences that are centrally controlled. In a society dominated by these central controls private goodness is not enough. The fight between good and evil can no longer be a local war; it has to be waged in the wider arena of the national life. The fate of society depends on the conception of life in accordance with which the central controls are exercised.

The situation is dark because of the more powerful grip which the modern organisation of society allows falsehood and inhumanity to obtain over the whole life of a people; and because there are as yet few signs of the imaginative understanding, the clear and strong purpose, and the outburst of spiritual energies that are needed to overcome these terrific forces.

This is not said to discourage. But the News-Letter is addressed to the Church militant. Its membership is composed in the main of those who are leaders in their various spheres. I am speaking to those who want to play their part in a spiritual struggle as testing as any that the Christian faith has ever faced. If we are to do that we must be free from all illusions and see things as they really are.

THE END OF AN EPOCH

The attitude to the war of many of the older generation leaves me unsatisfied. It over-simplifies the issues. It sees all the evil incarnated in the enemy and assumes that if he is defeated the world will come right. The complacency which takes for granted that victory will allow us to return (with some loss and impoverishment) to our normal life seems to me to be disastrously unaware of the extent to which the foundations of Western society are being shaken. The monstrous evils against which we are contending have grown up in a society of which we form a part.

The Christian cause and the national cause, just though the latter is, are far from being the same thing. If Christianity becomes identified with the cause of any earthly society—and in particular with the cause of a society as secular and materialistic as ours—we must suspect that it is ceasing to be Christianity.

Let me quote some words of Mr. Christopher Dawson in *Beyond Politics* (Sheed and Ward, 3s. 6d.): "Moral rearmament to serve the cause of the nation is not the Church's primary and essential task. Religion serves a higher creed than man can comprehend. Again and again we see the prophets, and One greater than the prophets, announcing the doom of their people, when on the short view they should have been devoting their energies to restoring the national morale."

An article in a small sheet called "The Presbyter" puts a case which Christians cannot dismiss lightly. The writer rejects the grounds on which the pacifist position is ordinarily defended. He accepts the use of force for the protection of society. He is none the less convinced that the present war is an utterly futile instrument with which to exorcise an evil which springs from the heart of society itself. While as a responsible member of European society he wants to end tyranny and secure justice, he can see no possibility of such a result following from the present use of war. He believes that it might even have been true in 1914-18 that war was the lesser evil, if Europe had used the respite it then won for radical amendment of life. But since the opportunity was not taken, the old expedients are no longer available. He cannot believe that armaments in the hands of present-day Britain and France can be a defence of anything by which Christianity should set store.

Unless the truth in this view enters deeply into our minds and hearts, it is all too possible that we may achieve our war aims and completely lose our peace aims. In that case this war, like the last, would have been fought in vain.

No single mind can grasp in its entirety this vast and tangled situation, and no single testimony do justice to all factors in it. Because the national cause is compounded of mixed elements of good and evil, the Church needs those who in loyalty to the claims of a Kingdom that is not of this world dissociate themselves from the nation and are prepared to suffer the consequences of doing so.

But there are vital questions which the pacifist conclusion leaves unanswered. And the state of mind in many of the younger generation gives ground for misgiving. That they should doubt whether this country really intends a radical social transformation and the putting in practice of the ideals for which we profess to be fighting is not surprising. Their disillusionment and questioning whether the sacrifices demanded will yield results sufficient to justify them are not difficult to understand.

But the resulting moral scepticism and lack of a sense of responsibility is serious. If youth will not accept responsibility for the future, what will happen to the world? This state of mind arises partly from the apparent powerlessness of individual action to influence the course of events and partly from an under-estimate both of what we already possess in our present society, in spite of its imperfections, and of what we are up against.

It is so easy to take things for granted—and it may be fatal. The ordered security which allows us, old and young, to pursue our studies and avocations in quietness; the justice which, however imperfect, is a protection against the most grievous wrongs; the freedom which allows us to discuss and debate the issues of the war, while the national existence is at stake; the liberty to protest and agitate against injustice and wrong—what would life be like if these things were suddenly to disappear as they have vanished elsewhere. Is it realised that in large parts of Europe life and security may for a long time to come be at the mercy of armed rival factions and marauding bands? And if that possibility is real, is it not essential for the welfare not only of our own people but of mankind that the measure of order and justice and liberty that has been achieved in our own society should be preserved as the indispensable basis of further progress? May it not be that these things are of such value to God in his slow education of the human race that He would have them saved by the only means by which it seems possible at the present time to save them—by the defeat of those who seek to destroy them? And is there any other means of averting the continuance of a state of ruthless tyranny and smothered revolt that would be as fatal to human welfare and happiness as the present war?

Again, there is a grave danger that our minds should become dulled by the magnitude and ubiquity of the evil which surrounds us and that we should fail to realise the horror of that which threatens man's soul. The nature and depth of that evil is a question of objective fact. For that reason I commend to your earnest attention the Supplement this week, which is a study of the forces at work in Germany by an able neutral who has all his life been a warm friend of the German people.

Doctrines destructive of all that has in the past gone by the name of civilisation and fatal to right human relations are established in the seat of power. Modern techniques have given them the power to corrupt the whole community. Their defeat can be brought about in the long run, as the writer of the Supplement says, only by spiritual means. But can this be achieved without their political overthrow? What other means exist of freeing the human spirit from the tyranny that threatens to engulf it?

I can understand and sympathise with those who say, "Even if that be so, the moral price demanded to resist this evil is too great. I must obey my conscience and leave the results to God." But to stand aside and disinterest oneself when all that makes life humane, sane and kindly is in the direst peril is to renounce that responsible action through which alone mankind can advance to higher things.

And if one makes the decision that to resist is one's duty, it has to be acted on

with the utmost energy. To wage war half-heartedly is fatal. Intense concentration on the present task is wholly compatible with the fundamental religious attitude. "Not my will, but Thine be done."

EASTER.

Over against this darkness and terrible dilemma stand the central facts and doctrines of our faith, to which our thoughts are directed at this Passiontide. We may differ as Christians about what is required of us in this tragic situation. But we are at one in believing in the efficacy of the Cross and the assurance of resurrection.

The death of Christ was the climax of the victory of holiness. In it the total meaning of His life was expressed. That triumph of goodness is woven into the web of history. From its reality and power mankind can never escape. The weakness of God is stronger than men.

What hope is there for the future in view of the grip which evil has obtained over the whole life of our society, unless we may believe in the possibility of a deep renewal of life, in the re-creation of power that will "burst, for us, the limits of what is possible and break the fetters of our moral impotence and dying"? Only this impossible element, the miraculous contradiction of the necessities of experience, can meet our need. Yet just this is the characteristic faith on which the whole fabric of Christianity hangs. "The re-birth of possibilities proved before by dreary experience to be impossible; the creative touch of power where no power was; the spring of hope against hope; the revival, and more than revival, of moral life"—is not all this the kernel of Christian faith, and our one source of hope in the face of satanic powers? [1]

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong,

Alleluya.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

[1] The thought in this paragraph was suggested by, and the words in inverted commas are quoted from, a volume of sermons by Dr. R. C. Moberly, entitled *Christ Our Life* (John Murray), given me at Christmas by my friend and neighbour, Sir Walter Moberly.

Subscriptions.—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 10s. ($3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. for three months.

For Groups.—Special terms for group subscriptions have now been arranged. Details of these can be had upon application.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET,
DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by St. Clements Press, Ltd., Portugal Street, London, W.C.2.

E CHRISTIAN
WS-LETTER

ARCH 20th, 1940

The Supplement
No. 21

ARE THERE TWO GERMANIES?

BY A EUROPEAN NEUTRAL

Is national socialism a typical expression of basic and abiding characteristics of the German people, or is it rather a system which owes its present domination over German life mainly to temporary circumstances without real roots in German history or German thought? The question is by no means a merely academic one, for it underlies all discussions about peace aims and about the nature of a future European settlement. Our conception also of the spiritual future of Europe must largely depend on the answer which we give to this question. If Germany and national socialism are completely identical, the "resurrection of Christendom" in Europe is no more than a wish-dream; but if they are not, that ideal may not be altogether utopian. It is, therefore, disquieting that the answers given to it are very divergent, not only from country to country—France tends to answer it in a different way from England—but also within one and the same country.

GERMANY UNTIL BISMARCK

In spite of the division of Germany into hundreds of petty states through the treaty of Westphalia, the ideal of the one strong united Reich had never died. The process which was ultimately to lead to the unification of Germany began in the middle of the eighteenth century when Prussia became a self-conscious and aggressive nation. The characteristic feature of this state was its authoritarian character. All citizens were to be servants of the state, of which the king is "the first servant." There was no effective counterbalance against the state. For there was no self-conscious bourgeoisie. There was no parliament. And the Church, which had learned from Luther to distinguish sharply between the spiritual and the temporal realms, accepted an almost complete control by the state. Thus in Prussia political thought became very largely state-centred.

Hegel was the first to give clear expression to the implications of this system. For him the state represents, therefore, the concentration of all essential interests of men, and thus becomes an aim in itself. A nation which is the bearer of a world historical mission has an absolute right. This latter notion is more fully defined by Fichte, who described the Germans as the one creative and original people, and considered its spirit as a manifestation of eternity.

It is this type of political thought which has proved most powerful in the shaping of the German nation, as Prussia became increasingly the creative centre of German unification. But that is not to say that it represents the only important stream of political ideas. Even in Prussia itself, and more strongly in other parts of Germany, two other trends of political thought tended to check state-absolutism, the one by limiting the state from above, the other by limiting it from below. Von Stein, the pioneer of the German awakening, believed strongly in a community of European states, and the romantic movement of the early nineteenth century was penetrated with a deep faith in the universal moral principles which should underlie the Christian European culture. These conceptions became again a powerful political influence through the conservative party during the reign of Frederick William IV. Stahl and Radowitz maintained that the national interest and the national mission are to be subordinated to the divine commandments, that is the inviolability of the rights and property of

other nations. In 1850 Frederick William acted in his relations with Austria according to these principles. It is significant that German history recalls this event as the "humiliation" of Olmütz. Unfortunately this conservatism, the strength of which was in its appeal to principle, became increasingly reactionary in its domestic policy and thus discredited itself in the eyes of all who desired Germany to follow the general trend of the European political development in the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, there was the liberal movement, the ground for which had been prepared by the thought of Kant, Goethe, Schiller, and the considerable influence of Rousseau, all of which thought in terms of the self-expression of personality. These thinkers saw the German mission, however, in cultural rather than political terms. And the liberal movement did not find a broad enough basis of political support in the country. When it had its great opportunity in 1848 it failed to give any constructive leadership. What was conceived as a liberal revolution proved to be a merely academic movement without roots in the national sentiment.

We have thus three political traditions which operate in the Germany before the days of Bismarck: the tradition of an absolute unlimited state, the tradition of romantic conservatism which sees the state in the light of universal Christian standards, and the tradition of liberalism which desires to limit the state by the establishment of constitutional safeguards against autocracy. The tragedy is that the two last traditions, which have at least this in common that they oppose an absolutist conception of the state, have weakened each other through the conflicts of 1848, and that by that time both were largely discredited, the one by its failure to achieve German unity, the other by its failure to organize a constitutional state. Thus the way was free for a strong affirmation of the autonomous state.

FROM BISMARCK TO THE WORLD WAR

Bismarck represents precisely that utterly realistic conception of the state. He has a fundamental aversion against all political doctrine and principles, and rejects, therefore, all conceptions which would limit the state in the pursuit of its interests. "The only healthy foundation of a great state is its state egoism and not romanticism." Through his influence conservatism becomes less and less a conservatism based on universal principles and more and more a conservatism of pure power politics, and that at a time when in other nations the necessity for some check on power politics was increasingly recognised. Now, in Bismarck's own policy, the results of this attitude became only partially visible. His keen appreciation of historical realities made him aware of certain limits which even power politics must recognise if they are not to become utterly destructive. At the same time, he had a personal faith, and while this pietistically conceived Christianity did not provide him with any clear standards for the aims and methods of his politics, it did give him a sense of proportion which made him see the relativity of all political power.

It is largely due to his admirers and followers that his conception of politics was soon systematised as *the* German view of politics. After all, Bismarck had achieved what neither the conservatives of the old school nor the liberals had been able to achieve. There thus grew up an influential school of political thought, the main principle of which was that political life is to be liberated from principles. Great German historians, such as Ranke and Meinecke, spread the notion "that the future belongs not to the universal principle, but to the regenerated national state." The prestige of this type of thought was so great that even Christian leaders became convinced with Naumann that international politics can have nothing to do with morality, or with Troeltsch, that in international matters "an order of law and law enforcement is for ever and fundamentally impossible."

In this way German conservatism broke with its own doctrinal tradition and became purely reactionary in national matters and purely realist in foreign affairs. But a similar fate befell German liberalism which tended to develop into a party for the defence of capitalist interests.

During this period two other forces appear which oppose state absolutism—Catholicism and socialism. These are successful in defending the group interests for which they stand, but do not succeed in influencing the political thought life of the nation as a whole. Thus the main current of German life in the era of William II is a state-centred nationalism which distinguishes sharply between state morality and private morality, and is so convinced of the world-political mission of the German nation that it accepts uncritically every foreign policy which seems to promise national success.

FROM THE WORLD WAR TO HITLER

The year 1918 meant the temporary and largely artificial victory of Western "democratic" conceptions over the Prussian and "national" tradition. It was a revolution in that there was a break with the main German tradition. It was not a revolution in the deeper sense in which revolution is "a return to a deeper tradition." The majority of patriotic Germans considered democracy as the product of a humiliating defeat and a vindictive peace. Socialists, Catholics and Liberals who formed the various governments did not produce a compelling political conception of the state, for none of them thought sufficiently in terms of the nation as a whole. The nation seemed to be disintegrating into parties, each of which had its own philosophy of life. Noble attempts were made to find a new basis for German life, but these were rejected on racial grounds (Rathenau), they were too short-lived (Stresemann), or they came too late (Brüning). The thinkers who were listened to were men like Oswald Spengler with his radically biological conception of history ("Humanity is a zoological matter"), his deep aversion against all Western ideas and his Cæsarism; or Carl Schmitt with his theory that political categories are independent and primary, that conflicts between states are existential conflicts to which moral standards do not apply, and that war is the decisive conception of political thought.

SINCE 1933

The National Socialist movement seemed at first a reaction against the Western "imported" elements of the Weimar period, but it proved in fact to be an attack on all elements in the German as well as in the Western tradition which in any way limited state-absolutism. All those ideas contained in German political thought which point toward a totalitarian conception of state and nation are now assembled in a motley philosophy—the state as an absolute idea (Hegel), the nation as a race of rulers (Fichte), politics as a law unto themselves (Bismarck, Treitschke), freedom as national rather than personal freedom (the Prussian tradition), and the biological conception of history as racial history (Nietzsche, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Spengler). The new factor is the utter radicalism and exclusivism with which these ideas are carried out irrespective of any other realities and forces of the German tradition, which had acted or could act as a counter-balance to unrestrained and amoral power-politics.

The state is now so fully autonomous that it is in fact a state no longer subject to any law or, in other words, politics now become so dynamic that they are no longer bound by any standards or norms, not even those of national tradition or culture. There is, therefore, not a fixed National Socialist conception of life, but political slogans are advanced and changed according to the needs of propaganda. Thus the theory of the autonomous state, which in Bismarck had yet been surrounded by the safeguards of an understanding of history and a keen sense of proportion, now appears in its naked and unadulterated form as the lust for power, by whatever means and at whatever cost.

Thus international life becomes the scene of a gigantic biological struggle in which the vital race, which has "the will to rule," will conquer the decadent nations, which are hampered by moralistic, cultural or other humanitarian scruples. The method is one of absolute opportunism, for treaties can be broken when they correspond no longer to vital necessities. The main principle is to keep political life in constant flux and motion, for dynamic development is advantageous for dynamic nations.

But during this period of suppression

large numbers of Germans have begun to realise that the values which they cherish most in their own nation are endangered when the power of that nation becomes the sole preoccupation of its rulers. They understand that to absolutise national life in its merely biological sense is to embrace nihilism. And they are seeking their way back to those forces in German and European history which contain the promise of a life which is not merely biological existence, but which has a deeper meaning. It is for this reason that many have rediscovered the relevance of the Church, but it is also for this reason that the Church, in so far as it truly preaches the transcendent meaning of life, is persecuted by National Socialism.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

It is then by no means accidental that National Socialism has grown up in Germany. It is not so much a completely new creation, as the *reductio ad absurdum* of one of the main traditions in German political thought, which have dominated German life for several decades. While outward circumstances, particularly the faults of the Western powers, have given it its great opportunity, it is rooted in certain aspects of German thought, which have been widely held in Germany for generations.

On the other hand, it is equally clear that the thesis that National Socialism is the typical expression of the German soul is not true. The Germany of a century ago would surely not recognise any of its ideals in the present German regime. And the large groups in German life which have remained attached, or found their way back, to the traditions of the old style conservatism, to the original notions of liberalism, to socialism, or to one of the two main Christian confessions, are all in one way or another and in greater or lesser degree in inner conflict with National Socialism, even if they do not oppose it openly.

The great tragedy of Germany's political development is that Germany has never had a real revolution, which is not merely a *coup d'état* but an honest and decisive battle between the various elements of national life in which the most spiritually powerful wins. This battle cannot be fought for Germany by other nations. Any attempt to interfere directly or indirectly in the German development can only postpone the solution of the basic problem of German national life.

On the other hand, it is a question of such vital importance to the whole of Europe that Germany should find her internal balance and that she should become a responsible partner in a European community of nations, that the other European nations cannot possibly remain indifferent to the future regime of Germany.

Thus Europe is faced with the seemingly impossible task of creating a situation in which a German revolution which is truly German, but which is not fundamentally irreconcilable with the other main European traditions, may take place. That task is in the last resort a spiritual rather than a political one. For the only forces which can check the inherent tendency of all modern states and in particular of the German state to become a "Leviathan" are spiritual forces. The problem of Germany's future is thus part of the larger problem of the renewal of the spiritual foundations of European society as a whole.

At present Germany and the Western nations have no common point of reference. The West must consider National Socialism as a denial of all that is worth defending in its life. But Germany—both Nazi Germany and the "other" Germany—is deeply distrustful of the West, because it does not see the Western nations live up to their professed faith in "Christian civilisation." Thus the baffling problem of the future relations between Germany and the Western nations can only find its solution when all nations concerned recognise in a wholly new manner that their very existence depends on the Judge and Lord of the nations and His revelation in gospel and commandment.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by St. Clements Press, Ltd., Portugal Street, London, W.C.2.